

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: PHYLLIS BLAZEJEWSKI
INTERVIEWER: LAUREL J. MANFRED
PLACE: TWENTY SECOND STREET, ADAMS, MA.
DATE: MAY 16, 1988**

**L = LAUREL
P = PHYLLIS**

SG-NA-T006

L: This is Lauri Manfred interviewing Phyllis Blazejewski at her house on Twenty-Second Street in Adams, Massachusetts. This is part of the oral history workshop at the Heritage State Park, The Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts. The date is May 16, 1988.

Well you have your list of questions there. Did you always live in Adams?

P: Right, always in Adams.

L: And your parents?

P: My parents were uh, came from Poland.

L: Oh they did? And they ended up in Adams?

P: In Adams, yes.

L: Did they know people here already, or how did they end up?

P: Well my mother came here because she had an Aunt that lived in Connecticut, but this Aunt had a friend in Adams. So she came to live with this friend in Adams because of the Berkshire Mills where they were hiring all of these people. Incidentally my mother was fourteen years old when she came.

L: Fourteen?

P: Fourteen.

L: And she hadn't worked at home yet? She just knew she wanted to come here.

P: She just (--) Well she just wanted to come here. She wanted to better her life. That's what she said. She was very ambitious and the only way she could get ahead is by coming to America where the opportunities were there.

L: Did the rest of her family come over?

P: Uh, no. And my mother worked for about two years. She saved up enough of money and she sent it and had one brother, a younger brother came here to Adams. And that was the only member of her family that came here. [L: Oh!] The others all remained there.

L: Okay. And what was your maiden name?

P: Debrowsky.

L: Debrowsky.

P: Umhm.

L: Okay. So you only had your uncle, your mother and your uncle in the area?

P: That's true. Yes, that's all.

L: Okay. What part of Poland? What city or town?

P: Uh, they were in the southern part of Krackow I know. [L: Umhm] Umhm, umhm. It was a little village that I don't think exist today, because, since the war you know. This is, you know.

L: And she worked the whole time you were young?

P: Uh, until the rest of the family, you know, we had, I have three sisters and two brothers, and one brother passed away. He was only nine years old and he died. He was the oldest one. But later on, my mother was widowed very young and she went back to work and she worked till her retirement.

L: Where did she work?

P: In the Berkshire Mills.

L: Still in the mills?

P: Still in the Berkshire Mills. She was a weaver. Umhm.

L: Huh. And how did she get back and forth to work?

P: It wasn't too far. It's not too far from this. See all we had to do is walk down the hill and it was there within five ten minutes walking distance, that's all. Yeah. But uh, on days when it was pretty bad, if my brother was home, he drove a car, he would pick her up and that was it. I had two older brothers you know.

L: And did you ever work at the mills here?

P: Yes I did. I went back there during war time when they needed workers very badly. And when my daughter was about, uh, shortly uh, oh about fourteen months old I went part-time, because they were looking for workers, you know, so badly then. So I worked part-time here, yes.

L: And that was after you had already been in and out of Sprague's?

P: After I was through with Sprague's, yes. Umhm, umhm.

L: Okay. And you told me a little bit before, but I would like to ask again how you got started at Sprague?

P: Uh, my girlfriend's sister worked in Sprague's uh, well I would say in nineteen, she started in 1930 or '32, something like that. And this was vacation time and we were sixteen. And she said, gee, they're putting on a second shift. Why don't you girls go and get a job to work during vacation time. So we went. We got hired right away and never went back to school. We just stayed. [Chuckles] I guess you know, you come from large families and money was hard to get. And the little help was appreciated at home and plus for us too, you know?

L: Do you remember what your starting pay?

P: Twenty-six cents an hour. I'll never forget that. [Both laugh]

L: And you said something about a quota, or commission?

P: Well we were on bonus work. This was, we were soldering condensers. Those are condensers that were used in radios and small appliances I guess, you know. And you were suppose to put out so much an hour, plus a fifteen percent bonus they counted, you know? And if you went over then you got paid accordingly to that. See? You were always, it was always bonus work.

L: Did they ever move your quotas up if they found you were (--)

P: Well that was quite awhile later on. Not right off the beginning. There is uh, I guess we uh, the working conditions I guess improved and girls were a little speedier, or something. So then they were making I guess too much. So they did change the uh, a little bit. Then we girls got kind, sort of had a pact between us. We never went too high up. We had to be contempt with just so much, because then you'd spoil the job. [Chuckles] But that was a pact between most of the girls, yes, umhm.

L: Did you have a lot of friends?

P: Yes. To this day I uh, if I go shopping to North Adams or something, I always meet people that I worked with. Yes, I made a lot of nice friends. I worked for a lot of nice people. Umhm.

L: And it was mostly women?

P: Mostly women, yes, yes.

L: Were there a lot of girls your age? Sixteen, seventeen?

P: Yes. We use to, every Thursday was payday. So we always, instead of going home we went out to eat, we went shopping and we always had like a little click that we always stayed together. And we had (--) And as a matter of fact, the room I worked in we were all friendly. There was uh, even with the boss and the, and we would occasionally go out, say like a holiday, or something. In the summer they organized a picnic and we went. We always had a nice, well a nice feeling between us. And we all got along. As a matter of fact, like you said, we were all young, about that, sixteen or seventeen. As we grew older and got, one girl after another got married, we always went to each others weddings. And then if we had an apartment the girls would come and we'd visit and see each others apartment. And uh, we kept in contact that way, yes.

L: Umhm. Did you (--) Was there a lot (--) Did work offer a lot? You know, you said they had some picnics and parties. Did they have bowling leagues, or any kind of thing organized after?

P: Uh, no, no, nothing like that.

L: Not then?

P: No, we never had bowling leagues, or nothing like that.

L: Okay.

P: All I know is that we had a dinner hour. And the, they had music on a system. And we girls would just hurry up and eat our dinner and dance our, dance right through our dinner our all of the time. [Both laugh]

L: And you got how long for dinner? Half hour?

P: An hour.

L: A full hour?

P: A full hour, because they have the cafeteria upstairs. And of course some people that lived in

town and drove cars, they would go home for dinner. Or some of the girls were married and had you know, a house to keep up. So that gave them an opportunity to do a few things, you know. But we people that are from out of town, we stayed right there, you know. We didn't go anyway.

L: And they, you paid for your meals?

P: Yes, yes. Umhm.

L: Do you remember how much they were?

P: Well, I think coffee was five cents. And you could have a sandwich for uh, twenty-five cents. It depends what you had. Everything was very reasonable.

L: And you were making twenty-six cents?

P: Twenty-six cents.

L: Would they let, would they take that out of your paycheck, or did you have to pay everyday at a register, cash register?

P: Uh, you mean the dinners? [L: Yeah] No, you had to pay as you bought, yes.

L: You had to pay separate. What about break times? Did you have regular breaks?

P: I think we were allowed seven minutes if I'm not mistaken. It was seven minutes. Umhm. In the morning. That was if you were full-time. But if you were you know, part-time, you didn't have that much. See I didn't work, I worked full-time most of the time. Like I said, I started in June and I think around spring time, you see that was, they put me on a full shift. So I didn't work as a part-time worker too long.

L: Did you get more pay when you went full- time? Did your hourly rate change?

P: Oh yes. You started with twenty-six cents, but after awhile you, say you had like a three month period that you know, to see if you make it or not, it went up, but it never went up to what it is now. But I think we had a ten cent raise, and then it was a fifteen cent raise. Yes, umhm, umhm.

L: Okay. Let's see. You got married?

P: In '41.

L: In 1941. And you stayed at work for awhile?

P: I stayed. Well see, when I got married it was in May. That was forty-seven years ago. [L: Wow!] And uh, then of course war broke out you know, in December. So then we went on defense. See I started on Beaver Street. That's where I worked. That was the beginning. And

then when war broke out they went on defense work. So we went on Brown Street. They transferred us girls to Brown Street. And uh, we were working on bombs, firing pins. And I didn't stay very long in there, because they put me in a room upstairs that was all strictly for gas mask work. [L: Hm] And uh, I worked on civilian masks and I worked on combat masks. And that's where I finished off my career, with the combat masks, because then I was expecting my first child. And the smell of the rubber was more than I could take.

L: More than you could take.

P: Yes. And then I had all intentions of going back, but I never went back after my daughter was born. I just couldn't leave her.

L: Yeah. Did your husband ever work at Sprague's?

P: Never up Sprague's. No, no. no.

L: No? And did he become a soldier?

P: No, my husband never went into the service. His mother was a widow and three of his brothers went into the service and they left him to take care of his mother.

L: Umhm.

P: But I had two brothers in the service.

L: Okay. Um, what was the feeling at Sprague when they started gearing up for the war production? Were people really, they wanted to work hard and do their part?

P: Well a lot of women came to work that were already older and retired. And they all pitched in and we worked long hours. Ten hour days. [L: Hm] And it seemed all we did was work, work, because they needed all of this I suppose, all the uh, whatever we were making. The bombs and all of this. And uh, so everybody was, you know, nobody complained. Everybody just worked and that's it. That was the way of life I guess. They, you know, everybody had a brother or a husband, or somebody in the service, you know? So everybody was willing to work and do their share.

L: Did you like your managers and your bosses?

P: Very much so. They were all very friendly. Yes, very much so. Yes.

L: Did people (--) Was there a regular grievance procedure if somebody didn't like something?

P: There wasn't too much of that. [L: Good] I know that there was one strike while I was still on Beaver Street that we walked out. And but there was nothing like hard feelings or anything. See there was a union. And uh, so most of the people had to go out, because you belonged to the union and it was more or less like closed shop. You had to go out, but a lot of people weren't

pleased to go out, but you just had to do it. So we didn't stay out very long. They settled pretty quickly.

L: Umhm. Was that the uh, the one day strike? There was, in the fall of 1936 they had a one day, they had a walk out I guess. And then uh, (--)

P: I don't think I was in on that, [L: no?] because I just started to work. And uh, I don't think (--)

L: Okay, you're in 19 (--)

P: We didn't uh, see, we weren't asked to join a union as yet, because we were part-time workers.

L: Okay.

P: We didn't start until we went on full-time.

L: Umhm. And then that was the 1941 strike and it was nine days.

P: But what month was that?

L: It was September.

P: September of 41?

L: September of 41.

P: Let's see. And uh, I left work. Oh yes, yes, nine days, that's right. That was a long time. Yes I remember being out. But I don't, I can't recall too much about you know, what went on there.

L: Yeah. They said it was a nine day walk-out for a 15% wage increase, because they were trying to get sixty cents. [P: Umhm] It's not a lot. [Laughs]

P: That was not a lot. No, no.

L: That's pretty good.

P: But they had a good reason for walking out, when you consider that. [L: really] No, I can't recall too much of that, because I don't think I participated. I stayed out.

L: Did you? [P: Um] Yeah. How about a lot of the other people you worked with? Were they for it, or?

P: Most of them were for it, yes, yes, umhm.

L: Did it divide the shop at all?

P: Not really, no. No, there was no hard feelings. I never recall any hard feelings. You know, the first week or so people were cruel or something, but then, then it just died down a little and everybody got along. There was never anything bitter. I can't recall any bitter feelings.

L: Was a clean place to work?

P: Uh, I would say it was. It wasn't, our working conditions weren't that bad. I don't recall you know, coming home you know, and being dirty dirty, you know? No, the shop, what I did wasn't very dirty.

L: And you were soldering?

P: I was soldering condensers and then until the war broke out and then I did what, I worked in the, with the you know, [L: gas] the gas masked, yes.

L: The friend that you started work with, did she keep the same kind of jobs that you did?

P: No, my girlfriend, no. She uh, as a matter of fact she didn't stay very long. She met someone there. She uh, married very young. I think she was seventeen. And he was a serviceman. So she just followed him around. [L: Umhm] No, no, I never followed up with her after. Isn't that funny? [L: Huh] Yes, umhm. But I met some other girls and we would go out together, dances and all of that. No, I never followed up with her after that. She went (--) When we both got hired at the same time, but they put her in a different section and she did a different type of work than I did. And like I said, she didn't last very long, just about a year there. And she met her future husband and took off with him.

L: Did there seem to be any rhyme or reason to how people transferred jobs? You know, you go in one day and you find out you're transferred to Brown Street? Did it make sense like you ended up in one place and your friend ended up in another?

P: Not really. See uh, when we went looking for uh, she was interviewed first. So there was the opening there, so they put her there. And then I was interviewed after her, so they put me somewhere else, just for that reason, but not because we came together they didn't put us together, no. We were very young and naive, so we didn't even ask [Chuckles] to be. Naive was right and frightened.

L: Did you punch a time clock?

P: Yes, definitely. Yup.

L: And how did they pay? Right to the minute?

P: Yes. Yes. You were allowed to be late so many minutes and you weren't docked, but if you

were late say, I think it was uh, a seven minute period sometimes, if you were late then you'd get docked you know, fifteen minutes, or a half an hour. Yup, umhm.

L: Did they have any kind of health insurance then?

P: We were always insured. Yes. We had an insurance and hospitalization, yes. Umhm, umhm.

L: Um, that's a pretty good deal. [P: Umhm] Was it hard? You know, these different, like soldering, you've probably never soldered before. Was it (--)

P: Well it wasn't a difficult job. It was just you had to be careful, because if that solder dropped it was hot. [Laughs] That's all, you had to be very careful, but it wasn't a difficult job. No.

L: No heavy lifting?

P: Oh no, definitely not. No.

L: How many did you have to solder in an hour? How many pieces?

P: Well there were different sizes. [L: Umhm] See, some of the condensers were small and they were easier. So you could really put out 300 an hour. But some of them were larger and more difficult, so you were lucky if you could put out over a hundred. But see different size condensers had different rates. See, you had to mark. When you ask for work they brought you a tray of condensers and it was already counted. So you had to write what kind you're working on. Whether it was you know, different companies. The Delco, Philco and all of this, and what type. And that's how they knew what kind you worked on. And that's how you got paid, according to that. See, like I said, they had a different rate on the different size.

L: Did (--). And they had somebody, you needed more soldering, iron and so on (--)

P: Yes. They always had a man that would uh, if you needed help he would, you would have to call him. He came and supplied you. And then they had what they called the floor lady. And she would give you the work and took it away as you finished. They always had people doing that. See, you just sat at the table and you did your work and they supplied you.

L: Was the floor lady a job that anybody wanted? I mean was it a promotion kind of thing? Or is it just her job?

P: Uh, I can't recall on that, because when I went to work they already had these people. But when there was an opening they'd ask somebody if they wanted it. And you know, the first one that asked for it and wanted it, I guess got the job.

L: Umhm. Were the managers mostly women or men?

P: Men. [L: Men?] Men, yes.

L: Umhm. And they were pretty reasonable to work for?

P: Very much so. The ones I worked for, yes.

L: Do you remember any of their names?

P: Oh yes. Uh, my first boss was Rod [McAlplane?]. I understand he's living in California. He has several patents and he's a very rich man. And then I worked with someone from North Adams. Now he was my other, my second boss, was James [Mancooso].

L: Oh yeah! [Unclear] interviewed him.

P: And he married a McCann girl whose brother was instrumental in McCann school. [L: Oh!] Yes.

L: Pretty good. Um, and pretty much you just answered to them. They were in charge of their department and they assigned the work?

P: Yes. And they gave you the (--) Uh, say if things slowed up, usually they had a, Sprague had a slow period and that was February, March. So if the work wasn't there they sent us home early. [L: Umhm] But if there was an awful lot of work then we'd have to work over, say like on a Saturday, which we sometimes didn't, you know?

L: When they sent you home early it was off the clock, [P: yes] but you got to go home?

P: You had to go home.

L: What kind of vacations did they? What kind of vacation time did you have?

P: Uh, let's see. You had to work I think a good year before you, a weeks vacation, yes. Yeah, umhm. But see, I didn't stay long enough to get more than uh, uh, a week or two. Because then at war time like I said, well then vacations were you know, something that very few people took, because you felt you had to contribute, you know?

L: Umhm. Do you remember the Sprague logs?

P: Yes, yes.

L: Did you enjoy reading those?

P: We always did. Yes, I know it. Yeah. That was (--) I wish I had saved some, but I didn't. And of course after the, when that (--) I don't know if you had anything on the books there about James Doolittle and the Raid on Tokyo. Well they used our, the bombs that Sprague produced, because we had a big celebration about it. I think all of the workers that worked on Brown Street we all were, of course it was in the summertime, we were outside. And I can't recall who it was,

but it was somebody from the government came and commended all of the workers for doing a good job, because it was a successful raid because our product was good.

L: Huh. Pretty good. That was, this uh(--). Was that when they got the "E" Flag for war production?

P: Yes, that's it. That was it. Yeah, I couldn't think of it. Yeah, that was the "E" Flag.

L: I didn't know what the "E" meant, but maybe excellent.

P: Probably, yes. Umhm. Umhm.

L: They had a lot of employees and they said they went up to three thousand people.

P: Oh yes!

L: Come up with quite a crowd.

P: Hm, there was an awful lot of people. Hey, but like I said, it was uh, it made North Adams. Just about everybody worked at Sprague's and a lot of Adams people too, so. And most of the young girls, women, everybody was there, yes. Umhm.

L: And the people who had family working there, so they got in, their friends.

P: That's right, yeah. Umhm, umhm.

L: And do you go to the different party things now?

P: I did at first, but then you know, you just break away after that you know? I found employment somewhere else when my children grew up. And see, that ends that, because you make new friends wherever you work and you get involved with that, you know, and your family and all of this. Yeah, umhm.

L: Let's see, what else have we got here?

P: Is it getting dark in here?

L: No, not too bad. What time did you start work when you went on day shift? Do you remember?

P: It was eight till five. That's what it, eight till five, yes.

L: That's not too bad. With an hour for lunch?

P: An hour for lunch, yes.

L: That's pretty reasonable. And most of the time you got back and forth by (--)

P: Well I always had someone from work that had a car. And then we'd you know, travel with those people, yes. Umhm. [L: Umhm] And they'd charge us ten cent for a ride. [Both laugh]

L: Each day?

P: Ten cents one way, ten cents, twenty cents a day it cost me to travel with someone.

L: Oh! [Laughs] You mostly said you danced at lunch times. Is there anything else you remember happening?

P: Well then if it was warm we'd take a walk outside and explore the neighborhood there. See, they had the natural bridge up there and all of that. So that's what we did. But then when I worked on Brown Street we would take a walk through that cemetery there and read the names there, or take walks somewhere with the girls. Yes. [L: Umhm] In the wintertime you stayed in, but in the summertime we always went outside. Yes.

L: That's nice. Um, you stopped working when you had your kids? Did you follow up with any of your friends to see how they had, you know, if they stayed at work when they had kids?

P: Most of them did, especially the ones that worked in North Adams. You see, after when I, I, when I worked I worked for the Adams Supermarket, which opened up where the big "Y" is. So when I worked for the supermarket I met all of the girls that I worked with up Sprague's. You know, so that's how I always kept in contact with them.

L: How did? After you went over to the supermarket, how did you arrange for daycare for your children?

P: I didn't work for the supermarket until my children were school age. [L: Oh] And my mother lived a house away here. Since then she passed away, but see I had no problems.

L: Hm, that's pretty neat. And how did you meet your husband?

P: How did I meet my husband? Well my girlfriend, I had a girlfriend, from the first grade to this day we keep in contact. She lived next door to my husband. So that's how I met him.

L: Huh, fair enough. And let's see. He worked in the area?

P: He worked in North Adams. He worked as a custodian for a private home. And after those people passed away he finished his working career at the Williams College.

L: Do you remember anything much about you know, how did you feel when you changed from doing your soldering to going to work on the gas masks.

P: Well I think I liked that better, because soldering you're sitting down all the time and after

awhile your back aches. I liked a job where I could stand and walk around. I think I wasn't as tired, you know? It wasn't as tiresome. I enjoyed that much more.

L: So it wasn't just staying in one spot all day?

P: No, no, you moved around a little more.

L: How do you build a gas mask?

P: Well it wasn't a question of, see uh, when the gas mask came to us, see they didn't manufacture the gas mask. They got them. All we did is put the eye lenses on, the straps, and that's all we did. We just finished that off. The gas masks, I don't know where they came from, but they came in boxes. And we worked on this machine which took two girls, one on one side, one on the other. And you had a machine that you put the gas mask on and then you have to put the lenses on. And then you have to press a lever and that would clamp the lenses onto the gas mask. And so it took two girls to do that. And the minute you made the uh, you finished that off, there was a government worker right there, inspected it right away.

L: Each and every one?

P: Every one, because that meant saving a life. So if it was rejected you had to do it over again. It had to be 100% you know, perfect before they would get accepted.

L: The civilian masks were made the same?

P: The civilian were a little different. They weren't as fussy with them. And they weren't made of the same kind of rubber I don't think, you know? They weren't as fussy with them, because, well I didn't think that they needed to be as fussy with those as the combat masks. Yes. But they were all inspected, but I think that they were uh, the ones that were the combat masks, they were really given a good going over to make sure that it was you know, good, yeah.

L: Do you remember what the rate was on those?

P: Not really, no. No, I couldn't.

L: I suppose they just had to be right.

P: They just had to be right, yes, umhm.

L: Do you remember what you were making an hour then?

P: Well I can't remember exactly how much I was making an hour. All I know is that I would come home with about twenty-eight dollars, which was good money. And of course at that time you know, that was net, but then they you know, they took out for your hospitalization and all that. And uh, I didn't have many deductions, you know, so that was it. I remember the twenty-eight dollars rings in my mind. [Both chuckle]

L: Now when you were living with your mom and working there, did you pay room and board, or just?

P: Yes I paid room and board at home, yes, umhm. See my uh, I had uh, my dad died very young and he had a heart condition. So everything I could do to help out was appreciated. Yes.

L: How did you dress for work?

P: Well, always in a dress or a skirt. Nobody wore slacks at that time, or jeans or anything. No, it was always a dress or a skirt. Umhm, umhm. It's pretty cold in the winter. [Both laugh]

L: Cold inside?

P: No, when we were walking to work, you know? [L: Yes, I see] See sometimes you know, we had to park the car a distance you know, and we walked and you know, it was cold.

L: Do you remember if it was cold inside in the winter?

P: Uh, it wasn't that cold, because when I was soldering you had the heat. See, that was the heat was warm there. No, I don't think they were that cold, because I don't recall having sweaters on. Just a dress you know, or a blouse, or something like that.

L: Did you wear safety goggles, or gloves?

P: No, no. No, you couldn't work with uh, (--) On the bombs when I see, which I didn't work very long in that room, we did wear gloves for protection, because they were dipped in a solution and we had to take it out. So you had to be protected, yes. But on the gas masks, or when I worked on that you didn't need any safety precautionary measures, no, no.

L: Now what were the parts they were making for the bombs?

P: All I remember it was like a cylinder. And that was about ten inches high and about three inches you know, in diameter, or whatever you call that, you know? They weren't uh, (--) See that was just a part, it wasn't a complete see, yes.

L: No, no. Was it heavy?

P: Well you had like a crate, you know? They weren't very heavy. And they had so many and you'd have to you know, pick them up while they were dipped in that solution, you know? But it wasn't anything that you couldn't handle. It wasn't anything heavy, no.

L: Were you surprised each time when you got moved to a different job?

P: Well no. It was a way of (--) We figured uh, this was defense work and where ever they needed you they'd put you there and everybody was willing to pitch in, because we were

standing behind our country. That's the way we felt you know? That we were contributing, you know?

L: Umhm. Did a lot of people just quit Sprague? Did you know, the people just get unhappy and leave, or pretty much once you were in you stayed?

P: Well I felt with the people I worked they all stayed. Nobody uh, unless they had a very good reason, but just about everybody you know, stayed. I stayed with about the same people I started off with. There were very few that left. A lot of the girls got married and they started their family and came right back. So.

L: Now you did end up joining the union?

P: Yes, yes I did.

L: Umhm. Do you think they helped you?

P: At that time the unions were a help. Yes I think so, because I think our pay scale was very low. Umhm. And they improved the conditions. A lot of conditions you know, like the hospitalization and our insurance was upgraded a lot.

L: How about day to day working conditions?

P: Well the working conditions, I never found that bad anyway. So it was all right.

L: So benefits and pay.

P: Umhm, that was it mostly.

L: What was (--) Do you remember what you were making when you left Sprague?

P: I can't recall, not too well. I can't recall, to really put you know. It had to be under two dollars an hour. Maybe a hundred and thirty, I mean uh, a dollar thirty-five, something like that? Between a dollar thirty-five and a dollar forty-five I think it was.

L: And that was late 1941, early '42?

P: Because I finished work in '43, February '43. The end of [L: February '43] yeah, the end of February '43.

L: And you were working at Brown Street then?

P: At Brown Street, yes.

L: Umhm. Huh.

P: See they finished their gas mask order and I stayed with them until they finished the order. Because we had a captain from Washington, D.C. that overlooked the whole operation of the gas mask. And I told him I was getting through and he asked me to stay till we finished that order, because that was complete. So I stayed two weeks extra than I expected to, because we finished the order. They didn't want to train anybody else, because it took so long and that order was almost complete.

L: That's a good deal.

P: Yeah. As I remember, I even remember his name, because he was so nice. And he was Captain Falcione. [Chuckles]

L: And he was transferred up here?

P: From the, they said he was from Washington, yes. He was a captain.

L: They said a lot of the military ended up at Williams College? They used that as a training center. Do you know anything?

P: No, I wouldn't know anything about that.

L: No? Two worked, you know, you were saying on the gas mask machine you and another one on the other side. Who worked on the other side?

P: Well as a matter of fact there's someone I ran into last week. Her name was Josephine Gorgenti. I'll never forget. She's married now. Her name is Josephine Sacco.

L: Oh, and she lives in Adams?

P: She lives in North Adams.

L: North Adams.

P: North Adams. But about three years ago Sprague's, they have a club now and they sponsor trips. So about three years ago they sponsored a trip to Hawaii and my husband and I took it. And this girl that I was talking about, Josephine Gorgenti, she and her husband were on that trip. So we had a lot of people we knew.

L: You must have had a lot of fun working right with somebody you know.

P: It was. It yes. You know, you were never you know, it wasn't a drudgery, because you always had something to say to somebody. None of the work was ever anything like that, because I always worked where there was someone around you. So we could always, that type of work we did you could always talk. You didn't have to you know, just concentrate on that and you know, keep still. You could always converse with someone, which was nice. When I first started to work there and I worked next to a girl that had a beautiful singing voice. So I use to

ask her to sing and she used to sing all of the popular songs to me. [Chuckles]

L: What were some of the songs?

P: Well, Isle of Capri. [L: Yeah] I don't think you would know that. Springtime in the Rockies, Chapel in the, something about a chapel I know. Although she use to sing a lot for them, yup.

L: The bosses didn't mind?

P: Well it was, they never minded because we weren't loud or anything. You know, it was just you know, we behaved. [Both chuckle]

L: Let me see. The way it sounds you really didn't have a hard job, the hardest.

P: No, no, it wasn't really a hard job. No, no, it was nothing like heavy lifting, or back breaking, or like I said, extremely dirty or anything like that, no.

L: What's the funniest thing you ever saw happen at work at Sprague?

P: Gee, I can't remember anything that (--) I saw accidents, but you don't want to talk about that.

L: No, no.

P: Nothing really that funny that you know, I would remember. We had amusing things that happened, but nothing outstanding. No, nothing.

L: When people did get hurt they had first aid at (--)

P: Yes, there's a nurse there and they had uh, a little clinic like, you know. There was a nurse on duty all of the time. Yes, yes.

L: And how about if you just got sick at work?

P: Well you just went to the nurse and she took care of you, or you went home. But she always had something to you know, some pills to give you, or if you burnt yourself there was like dressing and all of that, but there was always somebody on duty for that. Yes, umhm.

L: So they really tried to take care of (--)

P: Yes they did. I couldn't say that you know, we were neglected in any way, you know?

L: Do you remember people coming in? Well I suppose when you were there, there really weren't a lot of people leaving the other mills to go to Sprague, were there?

P: Well let's see. Well like I said, most of the young girls came to work up Sprague's, because they had so many jobs for younger people. And uh, as far as the Berkshire Mills, I think that Sprague's paid better and their working conditions were better. See the jobs weren't so (--) Most of the people tried to get in there, you know? And uh, but if they couldn't get in there, they had to take the other jobs like you know, the mills, you know?

L: So Sprague was a preferred place?

P: It was definitely the preferred place, yes. Umhm.

L: And people really feel (--) You know, people you talk to now say they had so much fun at work. It was really just a laugh.

P: It was always a fun place. Yes, it was, because you worked with a lot of people. Like I said, you weren't restricted. You could, you know, as long as you did your work nobody bothered you. And you know, you could always talk. And see, like the Berkshire Mills, well the noise was so that you couldn't converse with anybody, you know? And it was, yeah, it was harder work. The work was a little more strenuous, yeah. Umhm.

L: Do you remember, when you had your strike, the nine day strike, did the relationship between employees and the managers change?

P: Not to my recollection, no, no.

L: When you came back in everything (--)

P: Everything was all right, yes. Everybody buried the hatchet and took, and just kept on going, that's all.

L: Were your bosses promoted?

P: Some of them were, yes, yes. Yes. I worked, in my room where I started work there was two young fellows that they did the clerical work. And eventually they did become bosses, but that was after I left and went to work on the defense work. And after I left I was, I read where they were promoted, yes.

L: Did many women move up in management?

P: Uh, not too many that I know, no. [L: No?] There were still a lot of men around. They didn't accept the women that much.

L: Do you remember any stories of like after the war and the men came back home? Did most of them get back into Sprague?

P: There's a few that I knew that went right back. I think their seniority was unbroken at that time. They still, quite a few of them stayed and retired from there. Yes.

L: Umhm. So when they came back, women, because they didn't have the seniority, they took their jobs back, because they had hired so many temporary.

P: I know it. But see most of the, like I said, most of the people that came to work for defense work were people that were already, the women that were retired and elderly, they were glad to step aside because they were already you know. So that they didn't provide any hard feelings or hardships there, yes.

L: That's good. Let's see. Do you remember when they first started, you know, when the talk first started about the strike, the nine day strike, were people quick to pick up the ball with it?

P: Well I remember two people as a husband and wife that came to work and they were, they started this union business, you know? They're the ones that were instrumental in getting the union in there. And they would kind of you know, talk to everybody. And uh, well they had a gift of gab, let's put it that way. And they got people started on it. And then they had people that really joined them. And we had meetings. I remember the meetings we had. And well everything was gung-aho. They got you riled up that you know, you had all of this coming to you, you know. So that's all I remember about it. Of course when you're young you know, you're impressionable you know? You know, see when you're older you think a little different. You take more time before you answer. [Chuckles]